

# ECONOMY, AFFINITY AND INTER-CULTURAL PRESSURE: NOTES AROUND HILL PANDARAM GROUP STRUCTURE

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Theoretical interpretations of hunter-gatherer social organisation have tended to focus on specific factors. Drawing on the ideas of Woodburn and on data from one south Indian foraging community, this article attempts to clarify some contemporary issues and to stress the inadequacy of monocausal explanations in the understanding of group structures.

When James Woodburn first introduced his material on the social life of the Hadza to various university seminars in the early 1960's, it was greeted with 'extraordinary reactions of disbelief' (Bloch 1977: 288). Here was a society in which people placed a high value on individual autonomy and movement, where social life was not elaborately structured and ritualised, and where kinship was not the all-pervasive matrix that anthropologists had come to associate with tribal communities. Subsequent studies of societies with what Woodburn has since come to call 'immediate-return systems' have indicated that there is nothing particularly unique about the Hadza. Yet the disbelief continues. An earlier article of mine (1976) on the Hill Pandaram which indicated their lack of interest in systematised knowledge, and their lack of ritual classifications, led some to suggest that I had somehow discovered a group of 'non-human humans' (Myers & Gangloff 1978). Surely we have to accept that it is best to try to understand the social life of such peoples without preconceptions, and without, as Meillassoux suggests, interpreting 'history backwards' (1981: 19) and imposing on the data theoretical perspectives derived from other contexts.

This article offers some ethnographic notes specifically on the Hill Pandaram, and thereby explores and clarifies some of the various factors that seem relevant to the understanding of hunter-gatherer social organisation. I have undertaken this exercise because, over the past decade, several general 'models' of 'hunter-gatherer' social organisation have been presented which imply a mono-causal perspective. I argue against such approaches, and suggest that an understanding of foraging group structure and movement must involve a kind of processual analysis that incorporates a multiplicity of factors. The category 'hunter-gatherer' is itself problematic, and I deliberately eschew, on theoretical grounds, the suggestion of presenting a general and integrated 'factorial' model

that specifies in advance the 'limits' and 'weighting' of the various infra-structural factors which I see as analytically important: techno-economic forms, alliance structures and inter-cultural pressure. One can only judge the salience of these 'factors' in the examination of concrete historical circumstances. My discussion leaves many loose ends and unresolved issues. But at this juncture some response needs to be made to the mono-causal theorists, and if the present article stimulates discussion I shall be grateful, believing, to adapt a phrase of Hegel, that 'the owl of Minerva flies only at the coming of dusk'.

The Hill Pandaram are a small community of foraging people living in the forests of the Ghat Mountains, south India. Numbering about a thousand individuals and with a population density of 1–2 per sq. mile, their livelihood primarily depends on the gathering of forest products—both for subsistence and trading purposes. Early ethnographic accounts of the community describe them as isolated hunter-gatherers and as practising no agriculture (Mateer 1883: 89; Iyer 1937) but from earliest times they appear to have had established and important trading contacts with neighbouring agriculturalists, either through silent barter, or, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, through mercantile trade. Forest contractors facilitated the trade of such forest products as honey, meat, dammar resin and medicinal plants. This contractual system, described elsewhere (Morris 1977), is still an important aspect of their cultural life.

An early ethnographer succinctly expressed the basic pattern of Hill Pandaram social organisation when he wrote that people live 'in families of two or three in a locality. They do not stick in any one place. They remain for a week, and move on when the food supply is exhausted' (Iyer 1937: 97). In elaborating upon this paragraph, we may outline in summary fashion some of the basic features of Hill Pandaram group structuring.

The first is that they are a nomadic people, and although their movements cannot be directly related to food resources, as Iyer implies, nevertheless the Hill Pandaram are in fact and in sentiment nomadic, and constantly on the move. The usual length of stay at a particular camping site or rock shelter is from 2 to 16 days (with 7–8 days the average), although specific families may reside in a particular locality for about 6–8 weeks. Nomadic movements, in the sense of shifting camp, usually vary over distances from ½ to 4 miles, although in daily foraging activities or in visiting friends at other encampments Hill Pandaram may range over several miles.

Second, Hill Pandaram encampments are extremely small in size, typically consisting of two or three co-habiting couples and their children: the largest encampment of Hill Pandaram I ever encountered in the forest consisted of about twenty people. Each family is a separate commensal and economic unit, and is based on a division of labour typical for that of hunter-gatherers elsewhere, men hunting the larger mammals and collecting the honey of the larger bees, whilst women are the principal gatherers of vegetable products. Even so, the division

of labour is not rigid, for men often dig yams or look after children, and women sometimes collect honey. Foraging parties vary in composition, and may draw members from different families, but individuals (including children) either collect forest resources for themselves alone or for their own immediate family. Only meat and tobacco and the proceeds of the honey-gathering expeditions (usually involving 2 or 3 co-operating males) are shared between family units. Importantly, the family often constitutes a foraging party and engage in eclectic gathering. At an encampment there are no communal fires or icons (piles of stones or statues representing a deity). Some 30 per cent. of the encampments I visited consisted only of a conjugal family, and such families may reside as isolated units and remain separate from other people for periods of several weeks.

Third, between families and individuals there is a continuing pattern of separation and re-aggregation, although this is not linked to seasonal variations in the supply of forest produce, as in other foraging societies.

Fourth, there is a pervasive emphasis on sexual egalitarianism and women sometimes form independent commensal units, though these are always part of a wider camp aggregate. This is coupled with a normative stress on individual autonomy and self-sufficiency. However this stress does not lead to the situation suggested by Friedl (1975: 18) on the basis of Hadza and Paliyan material, where a couple do not jointly share the gathered resources but live almost parallel lives. Among the Hill Pandaram the conjugal family is a co-operative if flexible and sometimes transient unit. Linked with this is the fact that above the level of the family there are no corporate groupings. As for the Kadar (Ehrenfels 1952) and several other foraging communities, there is no unilineal descent system or ideology, and neither men nor women form themselves into any recognisable cult fraternity. There are no ritual congregations, micro-castes nor any other communal associations which might have salience for group structuring. The conjugal family and the encampment (a kind of transient corporation) are the only groupings of structural significance.

Fifth, although the kinship nomenclature of the Hill Pandaram is of the Dravidian type common throughout south India, and they follow the practice of cross-cousin marriage, my own data on the kinship system are revealing for their variability, vagueness and even for their contradictions. Many Hill Pandaram professed not to know the names of their grandparents, and were sometimes quite vague about their own parents. But apart from the conjugal tie and close affinal relationships (which in contrast to 'kin' links have warmth and intimacy) kinship ties among the Hill Pandaram are not 'load-bearing' in any marked degree. In Meillassoux's terms (1981: 20-1), kinship in the Hill Pandaram context is geared to mating and adhesion, not filiation. A phrase that Henry applied to the Kaingang comes to mind: he was speaking of a society 'whose very structurelessness permitted the building of stable co-operating units around sex interests' (1964: 45).

And finally, although specific individuals and families tend to confine their movements to particular forest areas or 'home ranges'—and are often identified with such areas—there is no assertion of territorial rights. An important aspect of Hill Pandaram cosmology is the belief in hill spirits (*mala devi*) who are

contacted through spirit possession seances; but there is no direct relationship between such spirits and specific families. Thus I have questioned whether terms such as 'band' or 'local group' have any relevance in the Hill Pandaram situation, for the home ranges of individuals and families who camp together on a regular basis do not necessarily coincide.

How does one account for this kind of flexible organisation? Why the lack of stable groupings above the level of the family? Why the pervasive emphasis on movement and individual autonomy?

One can attempt to explain group structure by reference to ecological or environmental factors. Earlier writers on the Hill Pandaram, such as Iyer (1937) and Mukherjee (1954), stressed this mode of interpretation, Iyer for instance linking their nomadism to the exhaustion of food supplies, as well as intimating that the limited size of camp aggregates was a function of low economic resources. 'They do not live in greater aggregations', he wrote, 'as that would affect their food supply.' But environmental factors alone—whether food resources are collected for food or for trade—although setting limits to population patterns and movements, are not sufficient to explain the frequency of movement and the nature of the camp aggregates. Hill Pandaram move their camps regularly and frequently, often over only very short distances, yet they forage widely and are sometimes able to return to the same locality within a few weeks. It seems reasonable to suggest that Hill Pandaram, inhabiting a forest environment with ample resources and where game animals are quite common, could live in larger, more settled social groupings as do the Andamanese Islanders, whose tropical forest environment is very similar. Indeed Radcliffe-Brown (1964) and Man (1883) speak of their settlements as villages and 'permanent encampments'. Coastal fishing is of course important for many of the Andamanese, but the comparison is still instructive and points to two interesting contrasts.

The first relates to the family. Radcliffe-Brown barely mentions the 'family' in his ethnographic account of the Andamanese, placing a focal emphasis instead on the 'local group', which is seen as having a residential locale as well as being a land-owning unit. By contrast among the Hill Pandaram, as among the Kadar and Palıyar, the local group loses its corporateness, and the family emerges as *the* focal unit. As Gardner wrote: 'nuclear families constitute the only units of Palıyan society characterized by co-operation' (1966: 393).

Secondly, among the Andamanese there were elaborate ceremonials focused on puberty and death. Both sexes underwent complex initiation procedures which involved the ritual eating of three ceremonial goods associated with men, hierarchically arranged in a tripartite schema—turtles, pigs and honey. Funeral rituals were equally complex and the bones of deceased relatives were preserved as sacred relics. This situation contrasts markedly with that of the Hill Pandaram and other south Indian foragers, who exhibit a singular lack of ritual or ceremony.

A second kind of explanation emphasises the mode of subsistence as a primary factor in interpreting the group structure of foraging communities. It assumes a close relationship between hunter-gathering and a specific kind of social aggregation. This was implied by Service's (1962) patrilocal band model, although in his evolutionary schema he placed several foraging communities alongside agricultural peoples as having chiefdoms. This model still has its advocates, for Williams (1974), basing his remarks on the Birhor ethnography, has suggested that the typical form of social organisation of hunter-gatherers is the patrilocal band—the 'band' being not only a territorially based group but, as an exogamic lineage, the minimal group necessary to ensure continuing marriage patterns. Data on the !Kung and Hadza would seem to run counter to his theory. The model certainly does not fit the Hill Pandaram.

A similar approach, but with an entirely different kind of model of social organisation, is provided by Meillassoux (1973; 1981). He admits that the model he proposes may not be generalised in all its aspects to other foragers, but clearly sees foraging as constituting a specific mode of production contrasting fundamentally with one based on agriculture. The contrast is made on two inter-related levels: between land as a subject and as an instrument of labour, and between a mode of social organisation based on adhesion with one based on filiation. Thus he suggests that, for foraging communities, the use of land only as the subject of labour fosters an 'instantaneous' production process in which the sharing of produce takes place immediately at the end of each enterprise. Once the product is shared the foragers are free of any further reciprocal obligations. Therefore this production process gives

no ground for the emergence of a social hierarchy or of a centralized power or even the extended family organization. The basic social unit is an egalitarian but unstable band with little concern for biological and social reproduction (1972: 99).

He re-analyses the Mbuti material to illustrate the basic characteristics of the social organisation of the hunting 'band' as he understands it—sexual equality, flexible and unstable social groupings, individual mobility, and a way of life 'tied to the present'.

This model of 'band' society fits rather neatly with my own material, and Meillassoux could very easily have used the Hill Pandaram ethnography to illustrate his thesis. But as an explanatory device it has grave flaws. Bender (1978: 218) suggests that the idea of 'instantaneous production' has a mythical quality about it. I have myself (1978: 162) remarked on the Rousseauesque nature of Meillassoux's pronouncements, for it is by means of the sex division and through affinal relationships that both production and reproduction are organised in *all* foraging communities. But what is singularly surprising about Meillassoux's analysis, seminal though it may be (and this is brought out clearly in a recent essay by Woodburn (1980)), is his failure to recognise the unmistakable similarities between the 'domestic' mode of production which he also outlines (1981: 33–49) and the social patterns of many foraging communities. Indeed in a review of the 'lineage' mode of production, Dupré and Rey (1973) actually mention the North West Coast Indian case in a discussion of the function of prestige goods, without seeing the theoretical implications of

the admission. Clearly the advent of agriculture is not the 'great divide' that many, including Meillassoux, presume it to be. However, there are dangers in over-reacting to Meillassoux's suggestions and entirely dismissing his notion of 'instantaneous production'. Meillassoux's theory is derived from a social reality and cannot be viewed simply as a mythical construct. Bender is undoubtedly correct to highlight the complexity of prehistoric foraging communities: the existence of trade networks, ranking systems, ceremonial prestations and alliance structures. But it is misleading to presume that all more recent foragers are simply 'impoverished versions of earlier systems' (Bender 1978: 211), especially as Bender sees the crucial dynamic in the transition to agriculture to be in the development of alliance structures. There is no simple relationship between foraging as a subsistence mode and a *specific* pattern of social organisation.

Woodburn (1980) has developed Meillassoux's insights, but has seen the distinction between 'immediate' and 'delayed' production not as congruent with foraging and agriculture—as a 'mode of exploiting the land' as Meillassoux puts it (1981: 21)—but as distinguishing two types of economies. He has suggested that there is a class of hunter-gatherers whose productive mode implies an immediate return from labour. A lack of investment in productive technology (weirs, traps and boats, for example) is seen as a primary causal factor to account for various cultural features characteristic of foraging communities such as the !Kung, Mbuti, Hadza and Asian hunter-gatherers such as the Paliyan and Hill Pandaram. Avoidance of long-term commitments, lack of ritualised social structure, fluid nomadic pattern, absence of emphasis on kinship obligations and ritual ceremonial, as well as an extractive technology that implies little thought for resource conservation, are all features which Woodburn sees as characteristic of this type of 'immediate-return system'. Against this are set not only all agricultural communities but those foraging communities in which there is a delayed return for labour, with the Ainu and North West Coast Indians perhaps relevant examples.

Three aspects of this theory are worth highlighting. First, Woodburn is not concerned simply to construct a typology of foraging communities but is suggesting a causal analysis in order to make sense of the empirical diversity of foragers. Second, the analysis shifts the focus away from environmental factors and technology—but without being monocausal or denying the relevance of these factors. Yet, third, the theory as it stands is inadequate. It is unable to account, as Woodburn acknowledges and attempts to explore, for one seeming paradox. The economic system of Australian aboriginal communities is of an immediate return type (and little different from that of the !Kung) yet their culture and social organisation is radically different from these other foragers, for they have 'load-bearing' kinship ties and an elaborate religious culture.

To take account of this apparent anomaly Woodburn shifts his theoretical ground, and the social patterns characteristic of the Australian tribes are seen as not so much related to labour investment in productive technology, but rather as a function of men seeking to gain control over women's potential labour. This is an important theoretical step, for it moves the focus even more decisively away from the technological sphere. It is a limitation, however, that

only then does Woodburn come to emphasise that 'affinity' has a crucial structural role to play, even among foragers whom he designates as having an 'immediate-return' system.<sup>1</sup> Although he stressed the great flexibility of Hadza camp aggregates, and noted the lack of 'load-bearing' relationships in this society, in earlier writings Woodburn had also suggested that the 'man-wife wife's mother' triad had a structural significance, as a recurrent factor in residential patterns. As he notes 'a man has important property obligations toward his wife and his mother-in-law' (1968: 109). There are thus structured *affinal* obligations even among so loosely composed a community as the Hadza form. With the !Kung of the Kalahari the importance of affinal ties in their group structuring is more pronounced, even though, all too often, ethnographers treat marriage and group structure as separate issues. The marriage 'alliances' characteristic of people such as the Tiwi are arguably but developments of social patterns present among all hunter-gatherers. If we ask how these insights fit into the other schema, and the broad distinction between immediate and delayed return systems, the answer is given in one short sentence.

The routes in the difficult transition from immediate to delayed return are likely to be many and varied but one broad highway among them lies, I think, in the intensification of control by men of rights over women who are to be given in marriage (Woodburn 1980: 111).

It belies the suggestion that in outlining 'two types of economy' Woodburn is presenting a static model and shows that his analysis closely parallels Bender's own criticisms of theories that attempt to explain agricultural origins by reference primarily to technology and environment.

Elsewhere (1978: 155-6) I have discussed the problem as to why Hill Pandaram (and Hadza) men do not, like their Australian counterparts, seek to establish a 'long-term productive exercise' involving control or long-term rights over women's labour. It is obviously not sufficient to suggest an answer in terms of labour investment in technology: other factors must be brought into the analysis, and those which have particular salience here are inter-cultural ones—whether from political pressure or from trading contacts.

Two recent writers have formulated theories which emphasise 'cultural' factors in the interpretation of hunter-gatherer group structure.

Fox (1969), in an interesting re-analysis of the foraging communities of south Asia, attempts to clarify the way in which these communities become 'enclaved' in, and exploited by, a pre-industrial state. Although he does not mention the Hill Pandaram his theory is relevant to them. The argument Fox outlines is essentially this: that people such as the Birhor and Kadar are not isolated foragers but rather an integral part of a wider economic system as gatherers of forest products. They are virtually specialised castes, living in the forest. For the Hill Pandaram this portrait would be somewhat overdrawn, but the implications of this theory with regard to their social organisation is germane. For Fox sees the latter as a function of an economic niche in a wider system. The pattern of highly migratory individuals, associated with the lack of any formal kin system in the composition of residential aggregates, the emergence of the family as the primary economic unit, the lack of extensive

reciprocity, or sharing amongst family groups, all features consonant with Hill Pandaram social organisation, are seen by Fox as related to, as he puts it 'the fragmentation of the society into individually competitive units, each geared to external trade or barter exchange' (1969: 142).

Gardner (1966; 1972) tends to underplay the importance of trading contacts between foragers and other communities. Instead, he takes 'inter-cultural pressure' as a primary determinant, and, developing Service's perspective, suggests a division of foraging communities into two categories: those experiencing pressure from dominant neighbours and those living in insular situations or in a culturally homogeneous environment. Those experiencing pressure—the Paliyar of South India are taken as the prototype—Gardner sees as representing a specific cultural type, characterised by a symmetric structuring of interpersonal relations, an avoidance of competition and status difference, and a stress on non-aggression. He sees Paliyan nomadism, flexible social groupings and isolation as a function of the 'pressure' they experience from the surrounding Tamil culture. This cultural type—'individualistic culture' as he terms it—is further characterised by such features as abandonment of the aged, a 'toleration' of incest, extreme individualism and a stress on memory rather than on traditional knowledge. He suggests that the !Kung, Mbuti, Hill Pandaram and Western Shoshone are all of this type. Although writing from an entirely different theoretical perspective from Woodburn, Gardner's 'individualistic culture' demarcates the same communities (and the same cultural traits) as Woodburn's 'immediate return system'.

The analyses of Fox and Gardner each imply a monocausal theory but are salutary in bringing cultural variables into the analysis of foraging communities. Yet there are limitations in over-stressing such factors, and it is important to realise that 'pressure' is a variable. Woodburn has noted that not all societies exemplifying the cultural traits associated with an immediate return system suffer from undue pressure or from exploitation at the hands of neighbouring agriculturists, but external contacts must have some relevance in understanding modern hunter-gatherer group structure or culture. It seems necessary to be sceptical of 'models' of band societies which seem to ignore such factors entirely (e.g. Lee 1972; Wilmsen 1973). Drawing on the work of Murphy and Steward (1956), I have suggested (1977) that inter-cultural factors are highly relevant in attempting to understand the present fragmentary nature of Hill Pandaram society.

Although the foraging communities of south India were once described as culturally the 'most backward' and 'primitive' of contemporary cultures (Darlington 1969: 29; cf. Elwin 1943) they should not be regarded as 'survivors' of some primeval food-gathering culture once widespread in southern India; rather, their position is functionally related to their being an enclave in a pre-industrial state. This stress on inter-cultural factors, which include trading contacts and not simply pressure or harassment, does not invalidate Woodburn's theory. In certain respects it is in accordance with his general direction, because in seriously trying to avoid 'monocausal' explanations, without collapsing into idealism or particularism, Woodburn attempts to incorporate cultural factors into the analysis.



As the examples I have listed earlier . . . illustrate, the [immediate-return] system is widespread, and not all the societies in question suffer from exploitation by neighbours. At the same time I think the idea should be treated seriously and we should consider whether pressure from outsiders is one of the factors which tends, in combination with other factors, to push societies towards immediate return systems. I think it is plausible to suggest that it is and that in a world consisting exclusively of hunter-gatherers a high proportion might have had delayed return systems (1980: 112).

We have, then, three clusters of factors of particular saliency in understanding hunter-gatherer group structure. Economic factors only become meaningful if the analysis draws on data relating to technology and to the natural environment which a particular community experiences. Woodburn's theory of two kinds of economy is certainly helpful in the context of understanding contemporary foragers. It may also prove fruitful in the study of prehistoric foragers and in the explanation of agricultural origins. We need to steer the analysis between two alternatives: between either assuming that in the beginning all was simplicity and human beings were 'culturally impoverished' (equated by many with Steward's (1955) 'family' level of socio-cultural integration), or alternatively assuming that *all* prehistoric foragers had complex institutional patterns, and thus all contemporary or recent foragers are but 'impoverished versions' of these earlier systems. The second cluster of factors (though equally 'economic') focuses on alliance structures—marriage patterns, ceremonial prestations and control over a woman's labour—with associated features of settlement, the development of trade networks, sexual inequality, and the development and monopoly of esoteric knowledge by men. Both Bender and Woodburn see alliance as a crucial dynamic in the development of social systems, and this insight needs developing. And, finally, inter-cultural factors are seen essentially as inhibiting ones, which prevent the development of foraging communities into complex forms, or in Woodburn's terms, 'push' societies towards immediate return systems.

Whether one seeks to produce a 'model' of band societies that can be generalised to all foraging communities (as many anthropologists would desire) or whether one seeks to understand the patterns of organisation and social dynamics of particular foraging communities (such as the Hill Pandaram), it seems crucial to bring these three kinds of factors into the analysis. All three are present in *all* modern foraging communities, and any attempt to produce a relative 'weighting' of them as part of a generalised model of hunter-gatherers can only be to engage in completely ahistorical theorising.

#### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Morris (in press) indicates the importance of affinal relationships in structuring patterns of residence and co-operation in what was otherwise a very 'ad hoc' and flexible pattern of social aggregation.

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